

the needs of our citizens. We passed reform that fulfilled those needs and restored funding to the nursing homes and hospitals.

Millions of seniors rely on Medicare every day. Our government must continue to improve and strengthen this lifeline for our seniors. We still have a year left in this Congress, and I hope that the President will work with us to find long-term solutions to the problems that affect the Medicare program.

As important as retirement security is to older Americans, education is vital to the future of all Americans. As a former public schoolteacher, improving education is one of my top priorities.

America's teachers and parents and grandparents have told us that they want the government to help improve the Nation's schools. We have responded by putting education improvement at the top of our agenda, and I am proud to say that we passed more education funding with less strings attached, which ensures that more dollars will go directly to the classroom.

Earlier this year the President signed our legislation that would give more control over education to parents and teachers and local administrators. Although Washington provides only 6 percent of the resources for our Nation's schools, it mandates over 60 percent of the red tape that our schools have to deal with. The Federal Government should be providing a helping hand not a heavier load for our Nation's schools.

We also passed legislation to improve teacher quality, improve student results, and give parents and teachers more flexibility to teach our children. Every child should have the opportunity to go to a school in a safe environment, and we are committed to seeing that those opportunities exist.

Likewise, all Americans must be safe from international threats, and so our Republican majority will continue our commitment to improving the national security.

I am proud to say that we have successfully increased commitment to our men and women in uniform. We have given them a well-deserved pay increase. We have increased defense spending in other areas so that our troops have the resources to get the job done. And why have we made this commitment to our nation's defense? It is a dangerous world out there, and for too many years the administration has been slashing funding for our military, while at the same time asking our troops to serve in more and more dangerous places around the world.

We currently have soldiers and sailors stationed in the Middle East, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, in East Timor and Korea, to name just a few places. Our servicemen and servicewomen spend months away from their families and are poorly compensated for doing so, and, as a result, many of them are

leaving the military. In these good economic times, it is crucial that we increase our military budget to deter hostile or maverick countries and to improve the quality of life for military personnel and their families.

We also passed and the President signed a national missile defense bill that will make our homes and neighborhoods safer. Many hostile nations are developing missile technology that will soon put the United States in harm's way. Fortunately, our missile defense bill makes it a national priority for the United States to develop a missile defense system capable of protecting us from the threat of enemy missiles.

As Americans, our liberty is our most valuable asset, and we must protect ourselves from those who would threaten it. National defense is among the most important roles of our Federal Government. This is why this Congress will continue to support our military and give our troops the funding they need to defend America and her interests.

Finally, we remain committed to providing tax relief to the American people. This is why we sent a fair and responsible tax relief package to the President's desk.

Currently we have a Tax Code that punishes couples for getting married through the marriage tax penalty. We have a Tax Code that punishes people for trying to save for retirement through the capital gains tax. We have a Tax Code that punishes widows through the death tax.

The time has come to get some fairness to the Tax Code. Couples should be able to get married without the fear of higher taxes, the government should be encouraging people to save for retirement, not punishing them, and our tax relief package was responsible because it took money out of Washington and put it back into the pockets of the people who earned it, the American people. It would be irresponsible to leave the whole \$3 trillion surplus here in Washington so that only politicians can spend it.

Our tax relief package kept faith with the balanced budget and it secured \$2.2 trillion for retirement security and for debt relief. As a matter of fact, our budget spends down \$350 billion of national debt this year. Although the President vetoed this common sense proposal, I hope he will work with us next year to provide tax relief to the American people.

We have come a long way since the House first asked me to be the Speaker, but we still have much left to accomplish next year, and we will consider a conservative agenda that makes America a more compassionate place to live.

Earlier this month the President and I went to the South Side of Chicago to promote a plan that we hope will revitalize

America's most impoverished urban and rural communities. It accomplishes this goal through tax incentives, environmental cleanup, and other private sector and public sector partnerships. Coupled with common sense education reform and better crime and drug control strategy, we can make these communities a safer place to grow up and to raise a family.

This is compassionate conservatism.

We will push for tax relief for the American family. It is compassionate to put more dollars into the family budget.

We will consider health care legislation that will make HMOs more accountable and health care insurance more accessible.

We will take up a trade bill for Africa and the Caribbean basin. We believe helping these countries help themselves is done more effectively with trade, not necessarily foreign aid.

We will continue to find ways to improve retirement security for our Nation's seniors by addressing the long-term problems that face our Social Security system, our Medicare system, and our pension system. And we will continue to do the work of the House.

As we continue our agenda in the second session of the 106th Congress, we will fight for certain principles. We will fight to keep the Social Security surplus dedicated only to retirement security, we will also continue to fight for the principles of a smaller and smarter government, and we will continue to fight against government waste, unnecessary government power and undue government influence.

Government does have an important role to play in the lives of the American people. It does have a responsibility to secure the freedom and promote the general welfare of its citizens.

But we must remember this: the Government works for the people; the people should not be forced to work for the Government.

I want to thank my colleagues for the great trust that they have placed in me over the course of this session. It is a great honor and privilege to serve as Speaker of the House. I look forward to an even more productive second session.

RECESS

The Speaker. Pursuant to clause 12 of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess for 5 minutes.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 20 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess for 5 minutes.

□ 1225

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order at 12 o'clock and 25 minutes p.m.